

THE 17TH CONGRESS OF THE USSR TRADE UNIONS

Speech by Leonid Brezhnev

Addressed to the 17th Congress of the USSR Trade Unions

Fellow comrades, to Mr. Khrushchev -- follows the full text of the speech "Our concern for the working people, demand for expansion of their sphere of activity" in the "Trade unions" made by Leonid Brezhnev at the Congress of USSR trade unions.

Dear comrades, esteemed guests from abroad,

The Political Bureau of our Party's Central Committee has entrusted me to address the present congress of the Soviet trade unions. This is an important and honourable assignment. Trade union congresses are a big event in our country's political life. The broadest strata of the working people are represented here. Gathered here are the envoys of those whose labour, in the fullest and loftiest meaning of the word, lies at the foundation of the greatness and might of our motherland.

Now that the trade unions have spread beyond the cities to include the rural areas, the collective farms, they have turned into an organisation of the working people that is unique both in numbers -- a membership of 130 millions -- and in quality.

On the ideological plane this emphasises once again that the world outlook of the working class, always the backbone of the trade union movement, determines the ideological positions of all the classes and social groups in Soviet society. On the political plane this means that the foundation of Soviet Government, of our state of the whole people, has become stronger, more stable, than ever. On the social plane this testifies to the fact that the processes of eliminating the distinctions between town and countryside and between physical and mental work are continuing, the fact that the working class, the collective-farm peasantry and the working intelligentsia are all part of the trade union movement is an important indicator of the Soviet people's growing unity, an indicator of the all-round progress of the developed socialist society.

Allow me, dear comrades, to convey warm, heartfelt greetings from the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and the Soviet Government to you, the congress delegates, and to all those who elected you to this congress. I greet all present on the opening of the statutory 17th Congress of the Trade Unions.

Comrades, the trade unions hold an important place in the political system of socialist society. They are a powerful means of promoting democracy and drawing the working people into the building of communism. The same assessment was made at the 16th party congress too. I am pleased to note that the Soviet trade unions play a big role -- and could say an indispensable role -- in solving the many-sided tasks our eventful and dynamic times put forward. This is as it should be.

Without in any way attempting to anticipate either the report by the AUCCTU or the forthcoming discussion I should like to share with you some thoughts that have a bearing on trade union work, on the tasks of the unions.

We all know Vladimir Lenin's words about the trade unions being a school of administration, a school of economic management, a school of communism. Those are very apt, meaningful, unfading words. They express the substance of Lenin's concept of the trade union movement under socialism. Several generations of working people have passed through this school in the Soviet years. And with each new generation efforts to promote the growth of social production have become more and more closely intertwined in trade union work with efforts to improve the working and living conditions of all working people, to protect their rights, to raise their living standards.

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The party, the state and the trade unions in our country are working hand in hand, coordinating their efforts, each carrying out its functions. This coordination, this unity, is a guarantee of success for the communist cause. It is unity that we will not allow anyone to shake!

Comrades, our party and our people have a high opinion of the international activity of the Soviet trade unions. This activity promoting the working people's interests and peace meets with due acknowledgement from our class brothers abroad. This is illustrated, for one thing, by the presence of a large number of guests from other countries at your congress. I should like to extend hearty greetings to them and to wish them success in their substantial efforts which are so important for many millions of working people!

Unity of the working people of all countries, unity of their trade unions, is more essential today than ever before. They have a vast area of common interests. Above all, a desire to banish the threat of war, to put a stop to the arms race, to preserve and consolidate detente. The Tenth World Trade Union Congress made this clear. It demonstrated a growing urge for unity and solidarity on a class-oriented, anti-imperialist basis: for combined efforts in the fight against the war danger and to strengthen peace.

Now a few words about the international situation as a whole. To say it is complicated and tense would perhaps be saying too little. The situation arouses alarm over the entire further development of international relations.

Take what has happened at the Madrid follow-up conference on security and cooperation in Europe.

Security and cooperation -- that was the mandate the conference had from the peoples. Instead, however, high-ranking representatives of the governments of the United States and (under obvious Washington pressure) of some other NATO countries have come to Madrid with an entirely different intention, that of poisoning to the maximum the international atmosphere. As a pretext, they chose the internal events in Poland. NATO bloc spokesmen began telling the Sejm and the Government of the Polish People's Republic and the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party what they should do to settle their country's internal problems. Nor did they omit slandering the Soviet Union and other countries of the socialist community. Representatives of governments that in every manner patronise the bloodiest and most inhuman regimes now to be found in the world, that take it out on people active in trade unions and other democratic organisations in their own countries, held forth unblushingly on the subject of "championing human rights."

Let me repeat: Polish affairs were no more than a pretext. No one will succeed in overturning socialism in Poland. That is also evidently understood by the foreign inspirers of the Polish counter-revolutionaries. Their true aim in Madrid was to add still more heat to the general atmosphere and thereby facilitate the sinister plans of the United States with regard to Western Europe. They want to make it a launching pad for new American missiles, a lightning rod that would take the retaliatory strike in the event of a conflict. Furthermore, they want to raise additional obstacles to the development of normal economic ties between Western Europe and the socialist countries. These ties obviously do not suit Washington, because Western Europe is one of its chief economic rivals.

Actions of that sort give food for serious thought about the future of detente and peaceful cooperation in Europe, and not in Europe alone.

Madrid, after all, is only a recent example. One could probably say that international relations as a whole have now come to a distinctly visible crossroads.

On the one hand lies the path of strengthening peace and extending peaceful cooperation among all states, cooperation based on unflinching respect for the independence, rights and interests of each country, on non-interference in internal affairs, and on joint efforts to strengthen world security and mutual confidence.

That path is clearly marked out in the provisions of the Helsinki Conference, and in many other inter-state documents of the past decade. And it has been confirmed by practical experience of nations, especially the European nations during those ten years.

On the other hand lies the path onto which the world is being intensively pushed by the newly fledged devotees of cold war and dangerous balancing on the brink of a real war.

They would like nothing better than to tear up the legal and ethical norms of relations between states that have taken shape over the centuries and to cancel their independence and sovereignty. They are trying to retaylor the political map of the world, and have declared large regions on all continents as zones of their "vital interests." They have arrogated the "right" to command some countries, and to judge and "punish" others. Unembarrassed, they publicly announce, and try to carry out, plans for economic and political "destabilisation" of governments and states that are not to their liking. With unexampled cynicism they gloat over difficulties experienced by this or that nation. They are trying to substitute "sanctions" and blockades for normal communications and international trade, and endless threats of armed force, not short of threats to use nuclear weapons, for contacts and negotiations.

It is simply astonishing to see it all. And you cannot help asking yourself: What is there more of in this policy -- thoughtlessness and lack of experience in international affairs, or irresponsibility and, to say it bluntly, an adventurist approach to problems crucial for the destiny of mankind? Not in our country, but in the columns of respectable organs of the U.S. bourgeois press this policy was described as "a course to political disaster". It is hard to deny the validity of this description.

Speaking of blockades and "sanctions": The Soviet Union is a large country with a powerful economy and a wealth of resources. And the socialist community as a whole is even more than that. So we could somehow manage, and let no one have any doubts about that. Among countries Washington calls its allies many are far more dependent on foreign trade for all their development. It is hard to say, therefore, whose interests are hit more painfully by the policy of cowboy attacks on international trade and normal economic relations.

Objectively speaking, the course of further straining the international atmosphere, escalating the arms race, and destroying normal ties between states augurs no good to any nation. And that, of course, includes the Americans. But the troubles it will cause all mankind may be numerous indeed. That is why we are firmly convinced that this course cannot win the support of the peoples, and has no future. The sooner this is understood by its initiators, the better it will be for all concerned.

As for the Soviet Union, we are firmly and undeviatingly set on the course of lasting peace and peaceful, mutually beneficial cooperation among all states, irrespective of their social and political system. And, certainly, we want all participants in the Madrid meeting, when it resumes its work, to finally get down to the business for which it was convened -- security and cooperation in Europe. Also, we want the road opened for a conference on military detente and disarmament in Europe, so badly needed by the peoples of our continent.

Comrades, the militarist line and aggressive policy of the NATO bloc, headed by the United States, are forcing us to maintain our country's defence capability at the due level. That is a grim necessity of the present-day world, and, of course, it requires diverting considerable resources to the detriment of our plans of peaceful construction. But as I have already said more than once, we have not spent, nor will we spend, a single rouble more for these purposes than is absolutely necessary for the security of our people, and that of its friends and allies. And we see the future not in the context of any unrestricted stockpiling of mountains of weapons, but in the context of reaching sensible accords with the other side on a mutual lowering of the level of military confrontation.

In this connection, of course, the problem of reducing nuclear armaments in Europe merits special attention. One could say that at present this is the key to ending the growing danger of a worldwide nuclear-missile war.

You are aware, comrades, of the concrete and far-reaching proposals made by the Soviet Union on this score: From the one for reducing by two-thirds the nuclear arsenals of the two sides in Europe and designed for use in Europe, to the one for completely clearing the continent of medium-range and tactical nuclear weapons. It is also common knowledge that the American side has so far been evading a serious discussion, let alone solution, of these questions, taking cover behind the absurd demand that the Soviet Union should unilaterally disarm, which Washington has, as though in mockery, called the "zero option".

However, we do not lose hope of reaching a sensible accord on the basis of parity and equal security of the sides. Furthermore, we are doing everything we can to this end, both in words and in actions. I can inform you, dear comrades, that, striving to facilitate a just agreement on a major reduction of nuclear weapons by both sides in Europe, and desirous of setting a good example, the Soviet leadership has taken a decision to introduce, unilaterally, a moratorium on the deployment of medium-range nuclear armaments in the European part of the USSR. We are freeing, in both the quantitative and qualitative respects, the armaments of this kind already stationed here, and are suspending the replacement of old missiles, known as the SS-4 and SS-5, by newer SS-20 missiles.

This moratorium will be in force either until an agreement is reached with the United States to reduce, on the basis of parity and equal security, the medium-range nuclear weapons designed for use in Europe, or until the time, if and when, the U.S. leaders, disregarding the security of the nations, actually go over the practical preparations to deploy Pershing-2 missiles and cruise missiles in Europe.

Further, we stated earlier that if the two sides reached agreement on a moratorium we would be prepared, as a sign of good will, to carry out a unilateral reduction of the number of our nuclear weapons in Europe as part of the future reduction agreed upon. Now we have decided to take a new step demonstrating our resolve for peace and our faith in the possibility of a mutually acceptable agreement. The Soviet Union intends already this year, unless there is a new aggravation of the international situation, to reduce a certain number of its medium-range missiles on its own initiative.

In accounting these decisions we are confident that the peoples of the world will appreciate the peaceable intentions and good will displayed by the Soviet Union. We also hope that our Western counterparts in the talks are able to respond to this by constructive steps in a spirit of good will.

At the same time we regard it as our duty to make the following perfectly clear. If the governments of the United States and its NATO allies, in defiance of the will of the nations for peace, were actually to carry out their plan to deploy in Europe hundreds of new American missiles capable of striking targets on the territory of the Soviet Union, a different strategic situation would arise in the world. There would arise a real additional threat to our country and its allies from the United States. This would compel us to take retaliatory steps that would put the other side, including the United States itself, its own territory, in an analogous position. This should not be forgotten.

This circumstance is yet another reminder of how significant the question of a Soviet-American strategic nuclear arms limitation and reduction agreement is for the destinies of peace for lessening the threat of a world-wide nuclear conflagration. As is known, the United States has refused to put into force the treaty on this score that was signed in 1979. Nor has Washington as yet wished to hold further talks on this problem. But the issue is becoming increasingly acute and urgent.

In the first place, implementation of the American plans to station new missiles in Europe could upset -- with consequences for the future -- that are difficult to foresee -- the strategic arms balance the sides have reached at the present time.

In the second place, the development by the sides of new types of mass destruction weapons (unless this is stopped on the basis of a treaty) could knock out the ground from under limitation, reduction and control agreements that are now still possible.

Therefore, we call on the government of the United States not to raise artificial barriers to SALT talks and to get down to them in the nearest future. Pending their resumption we would propose that the two sides undertake a mutual commitment not to open a new channel of the arms build-up, not to deploy sea-based or ground-based long-range cruise missiles.

In general, we believe that the situation in the world calls for maximum restraint in the military activity of the two opposing alliances of countries. We would be prepared, for example, to agree to a mutual restriction of naval operations. In particular, we would consider it possible to agree that missile submarines of the two sides should be removed from their present extensive combat patrol areas, that their cruises should be restricted by limits mutually agreed upon. We would also be prepared to discuss the question of spreading confidence-building measures to the seas and oceans, especially to areas through which the busiest shipping routes pass. In short, we stand for the largest possible part of the world ocean becoming a zone of peace in the very nearest future.

These are our new proposals on the issue of curbing the arms build-up and averting the threat of another world war. As you see, comrades, our party and the Soviet Government are conscientiously carrying out the people's mandate, are doing everything to justify the hopes of the people of our country, and of all mankind, for a lasting peace, for clear skies above a peaceful Earth.

Comrades, the time allotted for my speech is running out.

A few words in conclusion. The current year is the year of the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

This is a big holiday for our dear motherland, a holiday of the friendship of the peoples.

This is a triumph of Lenin's nationalities policy. At the same time it is a good occasion for a summing-up, for defining and clarifying the tasks for the future. As we prepare to celebrate this glorious jubilee we judge our actions, time and again, by the yardstick of Lenin's programme for the building of a new society.

The Central Committee of the party calls on communists and non-party people, men and women of all generations, all working people, to come to the Soviet Union's 60th anniversary with new achievements in carrying out the historic decisions of the 26th Congress of the CPSU.

Allow me to express the confidence that the trade unions will play an ever-greater role in the further development of our great multinational state, in the building of communism.

I wish you one and all, dear friends, big successes in your work and social activity, and joy and happiness in life.